

History of the Annual New York Avant Garde Festival

In the summer of 1963, John Cage, Earle Brown, Edgard Varese, David Behrman, Morton Feldman, Frederic Rzewski and I conceived the idea of a Festival of the Avant Garde for New York City. I realized this idea by choosing the program, contracting the composers, designing a brochure, addressing and stuffing envelopes and borrowing electronic equipment. For the first two seasons, Norman J. Seaman guaranteed our rental of Judson Hall, printing and mailing, although the ticket receipts were not enough to pay him back in full. Composers wrote new works and performed them; their publishers donated music and tapes; the finest players in NYC gave their rehearsal and concert time; schools and individuals loaned equipment; and highly skilled engineers worked gratis on each program. We worked without pay in order to establish the festival as an annual event.

The first year there were six concerts featuring the works of 28 composers from eight countries, with seven world premieres, 10 American premieres, and three New York premieres. (August 20, 21, 27, 28, September 3 & 4.)

The second year grew from six to ten evenings with the addition of a full-scale production of Stockhausen's *Originale*. There were works by 34 composers from eight countries with 17 world premieres, six American premieres and 10 New York premieres. (August 30, 31, September 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13.)

For the third season, special evenings of Jazz, Film, Poetry and Dance were added for a total of thirteen evenings. 57 works were performed, chosen from approximately 80 scores that had been submitted from all over the world. Because of the limited capacity of Judson Hall, our Festival turned away hundreds. (August 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 31, September 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.)

The fourth Festival took place at Conservatory Pond in Central Park in the open air from 6 AM until midnight, September 9. Sculptors, painters, poets, musicians, dancers, happening folks, playwrights, film makers and electronic composers from 10 countries presented a cross section of advanced research in the arts today with over 75 compositions. The audience totalled 15,000.

Over 30,000 people attended the fifth Festival on board the Staten Island Ferry Boat John F. Kennedy, 11:30 PM Friday September 29th through 11:30 PM September 30th. Approximately 100 artists from Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, and the USA presented their newest kinetic light art works, sculptures, video tape recorder compositions, environments, computer compositions as well as films, Jazz, poetry, electronic music, happenings, chamber music and dance in an exposition of the Avant Garde.

The sixth Festival was a parade down Central Park West on Saturday, September 14th, 7 to 10 PM, ending in Central Park from 10 PM 'till midnight. Artists and art works on floats, foot, push carts, stilts, placards, banners and some sailing through the air suspended from helium-filled balloons gave education and recreation to thousands of New Yorkers, as well as an opportunity to display their newest works to the public. As in past years, the artists donated their own time and materials to make the Festival a success, and major New York industries including Consolidated Edison and Hertz Rent-a-Truck helped to support our Parade.

The seventh Festival was presented on two islands in the East River — Wards Island September 28th through October 4th and Mill Rock Island October 26th through 31st. Works that should be viewed from a distance (inflatable sculptures, a 90-foot flame-lit tower, tree glass sounds, sky art, neon sculpture, island outlined with balloons and electric lights) were on Mill Rock and works that should be experienced at closer range (environments, television art, films, jazz, electronic music, computer murals, poetry, electric sucha, etc.) were on Wards Island. Over 150 artists' works were displayed in structures designed and donated by Buckminster Fuller (geodesic dome) and Yale Professor Felix Drury (polyurethane structure), in open air exhibits, hung from trees, floating on the water, and flying in the sky.

The eighth Festival at the 69th Regiment Infantry Armory, Lexington Avenue at 25th Street, November 19th, Noon until Midnight, was attended by over 20,000 New Yorkers. Works included premieres of the Video Synthesizers of Shuya Abe-Nam June Paik and the one by Eric Siegel; Shirley Clark's 45-foot "Video Ferris Wheel"; a "Video Kinetic Environment" by Woody & Steina Vasulka; a 12-hour videotape show; Otto Piene's 35-foot "Inflated Flowers Sculpture"; a 4-hour concert piped in from California Institute of the Arts; Yoko Ono's 16-foot plexiglass "Humen Moze" and other sculptures; orchestral "Wind Piece" by John Lennon; Geoff Hendrick's 12-hour meditation "Ring Piece"; a glider airplane event, "Docking" by Ken Dewey; Jim McWilliams' 9-foot Birthday Cake; a small Global Village by John Reilly & Rudi Stern; individual video exhibits by Douglas Davis, Ken Dominick, Ralph Hocking, Aldo Tambellini & The Video Freex; Robert Breer's moving "Rug"; a sound structure "Electronic Banquet" by Liz Phillips; audience making random drawings in Fred Stern's "Computer Composition"; plus over 100 pieces, poetry, happenings, electronic music, computer art, environments, and a continual film show premiering 33 films.

The goal of the Festival is to bring before the public the best experimental works, both American and International. The only requirement for selection for the Festival is the quality of the work, not the reputation of the artist; thus, young unknowns are given an equal chance for performance. It is important that the Avant Garde get as fair a hearing as is possible. The Annual New York Avant Garde Festival is dedicated to this purpose and is fast becoming an equivalent in America to the Palermo Festival (Italy), the Warsaw Festival (Poland), the Sogetsu Art Center (Japan), Darmstadt (Germany), as it was before Dr. Steinicke's death, the Daueneschenger Series (Germany) or the Zagreb Biennale (Yugoslavia).

Because NYC is now the center of the art world, as Paris was in the 20's, artists came from all over the world to participate in the Festival. It has achieved an undisputed position as one of the most significant and internationally acclaimed cultural events presented in this country. Some of the more than 600 works presented were by Abe, Andersen, Andrews, Apple, Ashley, Austin, Ay-a, Baille, Balkin, Battcock, Bayrak, Behrman, Bekeort, Berio, Beuys, Bienstock, Black, Brookhage, Brecht, Breer, Brock, Broughton, Brown, Buehler, Bueno, Busstotti, Cage, Camnitzer, Cassen, Chiari, Christiansen, Christo, Clarke, Conner, Connor, Cooper, Copabianco, Corner, Cowan, Crafts, Davis, Davison, Deyatkin, Dewey, Dominick, Downey, Dugo, Dupuy, Emshwiller, Engel, Feilisch, Feldman, Ferrari, Ferro, Filliun, Fischer, Forbes, Frampton, Frazier, Fried, Fulop, Gelmetti, Gerson, Gillette, Giordiano, Giorno, Giffure, Goldstein, Gosewitz, Greenfield, Grossi, Hansen, Harris, Hausmann, Heckman, Heinz, Heliczer, Helms, Hendricks, Hidalgo, Higgins, Hirsch, Hocking, Hogel, Horowitz, Hulsenbeck, Ichiyonagi, Iimura, Immediat, Isgro, Isobe, Jacobs, James, Johnson, Jones, Jordan, Kagel, Koprow, Klintberg, Kluver, Knowles, Knowlton, Kapckoe, Kosugi, Kren, Kubota, Larrain, Lebel, Lee, Lenglet, Lennon, Le Parc, Levine, Lezak, Lieberman, Ligeti, Linder, Lockwood, Lucier, Lundsten, Lurker, Maclow, Martin, Mathews, McLaughlin, McNeur, McWilliams, Mingus III, Monk, Moore, Moran, Morrell, Morthensten, Muehl, Mumma, Neumann, Neuhaus, Niese, Nilsen, Nitsch, Noll, Novak, Nunemaker, Oliveros, Ono, Ortiz, Paik, Patterson, Phillips, Picard, Piene, Piere, Pignatti, Preston, Pulsa, Raffaele, Rainer, Ramak, Reilly, Reinecke, Richter, Rieveschl, Ringgold, Risset, Romano, Rot, Ryan, Rzewski, Savage, Scala, Scherits, Schmit, Schneemann, Schneider, Schuler, Schwitters, Seale, Sharp, Shiom, Siegel, Skaggs, Snow, Sobatnick, Stern, Stockhausen, Streeter, Summerlin, Sun Ra, Sunshine, Tadlock, Tambellini, Taylor, Tcherepin, Teitelbaum, Tenney, Thomas, Toche, Usco, Vanderbeek, Van Saun, Varese, Vasulka, Vautier, Video Freex, Ginsberg, Viner, Vis, Von Biel, Vostell, Wallace, Warshaw, Watts, Welin, Weiland, Werner, Whitney, Williams, Wise, Wisniewski, Wolff, Wolpe, Xenakis, Yalkut and Young.